



## Australia putting lives at risk

One of the asylum seekers deported to China following a decision made by Kevin Andrews, the former Immigration minister is reported to have committed suicide.

Reacting to this tragic news ECCWA President Ramdas Sankaran called on the Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans "to show much more compassion than his predecessor did to avoid putting at risk the lives of those who have been persecuted in their own countries and have sought asylum in Australia under international conventions that Australia has ratified."

"Whilst it may be convenient for us to allocate processing numbers to the asylum seekers coming to this country, we need to remember that when decisions are made regarding their right to stay in this country, we are dealing with human beings in very vulnerable and life threatening circumstances."

"The man, known as Mr Zhang, was beaten and tortured when he was deported to China a year ago. He spent almost a decade arguing his case for asylum, repeatedly telling Australian authorities he was at risk because of his involvement with pro-democracy groups in China. His last two years were spent in Sydney's Villawood immigration detention centre. "

Refugee advocate Frances Milne who worked on Mr Zhang's case and kept in touch with him after he was deported; said "to find that he has now committed suicide to avoid further persecution and torture is very, very disappointing and upsetting. She says numerous letters sent on Mr Zhang's behalf to the present Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans, and his predecessor, Kevin Andrews, seem to have been ignored."

"Stephen Blanks from the New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties says Mr Zhang's case is a tragic example of how the system is flawed." He was removed from Australia in breach of Australia's obligations under the Convention against Torture. He immediately faced torture on his return to China and evidence of that was presented to the Australian Government and we have been pleading with the Australian Government to find a way to bring him back and there has just been inaction."

"It is very apparent that this particular asylum seeker was going to be subjected to the issues that he was fearful of and tragically, that has happened" Mr Sankaran said. This was one life that could have been protected had Minister Andrews demonstrated more compassion then."

If we are to be a truly caring and inclusive society we need to show much greater levels of compassion and concern for people, seeking asylum, than was shown by the ex Minister Andrews". "We therefore trust that Senator Evans will be very sympathetic to their cause and exercise his discretion favourably, at least as much as his predecessors Ministers Ruddock and Vanstone did,' Mr Sankaran added.

**For media interviews Mr Sankaran can be contacted on 0418275786.**

**M  
E  
D  
I  
A**

**R  
E  
L  
E  
A  
S  
E**